

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

25 November 2021

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

667,938 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021. Of the internally displaced people, 21% are women and 59% are children.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran informally through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **22,722 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January to 21 November, though the numbers are understood to be much higher. As of 22 November, out of the new arrivals approaching us directly, 1,603 families (consisting of 6,276 individuals), have been interviewed by UNHCR.

Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers. UNHCR continues its advocacy for the Government to open borders and let in individuals in need of international protection.



POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- On 22 November, UNDP called for urgent action to support Afghanistan's banks, warning that a spike in people being unable to repay loans, combined with lower deposits and a cash liquidity crisis, could cause the financial system to collapse within months. Since the de facto Taliban government took office in Afghanistan, the abrupt withdrawal of most foreign development support in the country has put a severe strain on the banking system.
- On 17 November, the World Food Program (WFP) stated that 22.8 million Afghans – half of the population - will face acute food insecurity from November 2021, including 8.7 million at risk of famine-like conditions. This is the highest number of acutely food insecure people ever recorded in Afghanistan and is among the highest levels of acute food insecurity worldwide. WFP also reported that the situation for children is increasingly alarming, with half of all children under five (3.2 million) are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, has warned that the country "is on the brink of catastrophe".

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR identified **22,722 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (who approached UNHCR receptions through 5,629 heads of households). As of 22 November, out of the new arrivals who directly approached UNHCR, 1,603 families (consisting of 6,276 individuals), have been interviewed by UNHCR.
 - **30% are women, 27% are men and 44% are children** - 25% (more than 1,500) of children are girls under the age of 18.
 - **Half of the population who conducted interviews with UNHCR reside in Tehran province**, followed by Khorasan Razavi province (20%) and Isfahan province (12%). Tehran is also the top drop-off province for new arrivals following their border crossings.
- **On 21 November, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security Commission, Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, called for the international community to fulfil its duty towards Afghan refugees and for the establishment of a regional task force to help them.** "Iran is one of the main destinations of Afghan refugees and due to the U.S. pressure and sanctions, we have no more capability to admit refugees", he stated.
- **On 17 November, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iran to the UN, Majid Takht Ravanchi, warned that Afghanistan's neighbouring countries should be assisted as they handle the influx of refugees.** He highlighted that thousands of refugees have entered Iran since the U.S. withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and cautioned that the number could increase by thousands more as the winter approaches.
- Different **government officials, at various times and events, have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals to Iran may range between 100,000-300,000.** UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures, due to the absence of a centralized registration system and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- **Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran continue to be returned to Afghanistan, despite UNHCR's non-return advisory and advocacy to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict.** Through its analysis of available data and information, UNHCR estimates that over 1,000 Afghans are being returned daily to their country by Iran. On 16 August 2021, UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan, which remains in place. UNHCR is seeking further clarity and reiterating the principle of non-refoulement to the Government.

REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**, an inter-agency plan with 10 partners, focusing on preparedness, limited emergency response, and expanded support to regular programmes. UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP, with planning assumptions of a steady and ongoing flow of new arrivals into Iran from Afghanistan (with an expectation that, although the situation in Afghanistan is likely to further deteriorate, there will not be an observable mass influx into neighbouring countries), with borders likely to continue to be tightly managed. The 2022 RRP development is advancing, with a total budget of US\$258.7 million having been agreed with 15 partners, covering 8 sectors.
- **UNHCR's Sub-Office in Kerman reported that, along with land levelling and grading at the Niatak site, the renovation of the health post is also taking place.** In addition, according to BAFIA, it was confirmed that food items sent by UNHCR were distributed to 12,800 new arrivals. This included 11,800 persons who arrived between 24 August and 19 September 2021 at the Government-run Alghadir centre in Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchistan Province) and 1,000 individuals who arrived between 3 September and 6 September 2021 in Saravan, bordering Pakistan.
- In light of newly arrived persons moving towards urban centres, UNHCR is strongly advocating with BAFIA for a **complementary urban response**. This is also to avoid an encampment policy at the border and have a hybrid response, in line with UNHCR global policy. Activities being proposed for an urban response include cash-based assistance, as well as reinforcing UNHCR's regular activities like education and health support.

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Government of Iran informed UNHCR that, under a worst-case scenario, they anticipate that up to **500,000 new arrivals from Afghanistan could enter Iran over 6-months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in locations along the border. Shelter, health and food would be the priorities to cope with the Government's scenario.

Such contingency planning is a Government-led process. UNHCR continues to seek additional guidance and clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and the process for receiving them.

UNHCR coordinates the refugee response among international actors in Iran, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the globally-agreed **Refugee Coordination Model**. UNHCR and BAFIA convene on a regular basis, through an agreed-upon biweekly/bilateral meeting. Discussions are ongoing around options for more inclusive coordination.

FUNDING NEEDS

For 2021, the **interagency regional funding needs are USD 299 million, including almost USD 131 million for UNHCR alone**.

For Iran, **interagency needs are USD 135.8 million, including USD 58.9 million for UNHCR**. As of 23 November, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 28 million, indicating that the RRRP is 21% funded. This analysis is based on partners reporting new funding; however, the actual funding is likely higher, as many partners have not yet reported on the funding they have most recently received.

UNHCR Iran's funding needs for both its regular and emergency programmes in 2021 are USD 112.1 million. As of 23 November 2021, UNHCR's **overall programmes in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **54% funded**.

FUNDING UPDATE

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to the operation in Iran, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds. Whilst interest in the current emergency is relevant and opportune, UNHCR wishes to also highlight ongoing regular programming needs which are severely underfunded.

Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **20.4 million**

European Union 9.2 million | **Japan** 3.85 million | **United Kingdom** 2.69 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Italy** 1.77 | **Japan** 3.85 million | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Qatar Airways** 0.17 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

Germany 95.9 million | **Private donors Australia** 15.9 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Germany** 5.5 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 3.8 million | **Private donors Spain** 3.6 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.8 million

Canada | Czech Republic | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | New Zealand | Poland | Slovakia | Slovenia | Spain | Private donors

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 75.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 69.3 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 35.3 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Japan** 27.7 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Private donors Italy** 17.6 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Sweden** 14.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhoyroo

External Relations Officer

bhoyroo@unhcr.org, +98 912 132 7183 (mobile and WhatsApp)

Alexandra Stenbock-Fermor

Associate Donor Relations Officer

stenbock@unhcr.org, +98 912 135 4232 (mobile and WhatsApp)